



RESEARCH PAPER

Rising tide of Illiberalism and its Growing Influence on Democratization

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to review the rising tide of Illiberalism and its growing influence on democratization. Illiberalism, in counter to liberal democracy, refers to the kind of rule that is somewhat democratic but not genuinely democratized. Political leaders distort the mechanism of conducting elections, influence the coverage of the media, and use the notion of nationalism to strengthen their position. The qualitative method of research has been adopted whereas primary and secondary sources are adopted for data collection. Case studies from the United States under Donald Trump, India under Narendra Modi, and Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdogan illustrate these phenomena. It shows that such practices of illiberalism erode democratic institutions, civil liberties, and checks and balances in the country. The paper suggests steps for improving the electoral oversight, media freedom, Global cooperation and civic education. All these measures are critical for the sustainability of democratization in the wake of surging illiberal forces.

KEYWORDS Democratic Backsliding, Democratic Regression, Democratic Values, Freedom, Illiberalism

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, the world observed a gradual maturing of democracy across the globe. It appeared that liberal democracy was unbeatable and gradually establishing itself on the global scale; however, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, evil winds of illiberal democracy blew in, weakening the democratic values and institutions that underpinned the notion of liberal democracy. At present, this illiberal trend undermines the principles that have been the founding blocks of democracies, which has led to a rather alarming tendency of democratic regression. Illiberalism in its essence, is the conduct of undemocratic actions under the veil of democratic norms. Thomas J Main the author of the book "The Rise of Illiberalism" defines "Illiberalism as an ideology that rejects any of the principles of liberal democracy, which are: political egalitarianism, human rights, limited government, electoral democracy, the rule of law, a political culture of tolerance, and an ethics of controversy based on rational discourse." (Cohen, 2022).

While authoritarian politicians and political formations are on the rise, democratic erosion, or democratization regression – a process that speaks of a deviation of societies from democratic values and standards – has emerged as one of the leading threats to democratic systems. This phenomenon has blurred the clear pursuit of democracy that various nations around the globe are yearning for. (Wolkenstein, 2022)

Democratic freedoms are lessening however, autocratic regimes, along with nationalist movements are major threat for sustainability of democracy in the twenty-first century. This backsliding that erodes democratic institutions and values, is causing a crisis of democracies today. The substantive role of illiberalism as a cause of democratic erosion is still somewhat unknown and more research into its effects is needed. Although, since the beginning of the 2010s, attention has been paid to studying illiberal trends based on their features and manifestations. Yet, the available literature lacks sufficient works that study the dynamics of the tensions that underpin illiberalism and its impact on the processes of democratic governance (Lodhi, 2023).

Authoritarianism has become a phenomenon worldwide, acting in contrast to the liberal-democratic paradigm. Currently, we have seen examples of how politics leaders such as Erdogan, Modi, and Trump manipulate democratic institutions in capturing power.

The United States has witnessed recurring violations of democracy with leaders such as Trump in spite of occurrences like the Capitol riot. Moreover, the originally democrat Turkiye of Erdogan government has experienced media tyranny, judicial reform which made it less independent and more submissive to Erdogan's orders contributing to backsliding of democracy. Moreover, there has been a decline in civil liberties, specific restrictions to media freedom as well as undue pressures towards the minorities throughout the Modi administration in India thus registering more of illiberal tendencies which are inimical to democratic tenets. This research aims to provide a general analysis of the link between illiberalism and democratic backsliding to fill this existing knowledge gap.

Literature Review

The main argument that Fareed Zakaria puts across in his 'Rise of Illiberalism' is that although democracy is on the rise across the world, there is a rising trend of "illiberal democracy" where popularly elected governments continue to wield power with little regard for constitutional norms of separation of powers or respect for civil liberties of citizens. Internationalizing democracy, according to Zakaria, is a good thing, but people should prioritize liberty and ensure that a constitution shields them from tyranny. There are certain aspects that Zakaria does not explore in detail regarding the possible causes of illiberal democracy (Zakaria, 1997).

The paper 'From Liberal Democracy to Illiberalism' by Balázs Böcskei provides a comprehensive analysis of illiberal democracy as a phenomenon characterized by complexity since it depends on the historical and regional contexts. The researcher postures that the 2015 refugee crisis revealed a huge difference in European sovereignty ideas and established that liberal democracy is still a subject of struggle. Böcskei also disagrees with Fukuyama regarding liberal democracy as the end of history since rivals have emerged in modern society. Following Fareed Zakaria's initial introduction to the concept of 'illiberal democracy', Böcskei stresses the differences in how illiberalism emerges in different contexts and how it is consequently crucial to provide context-sensitive analysis. The paper does not go into the description of illiberalism as a phenomenon, but it emphasizes the need to explore the social and ideological processes underlying the transformation from a liberal to an illiberal political regime (Böcskei, 2016).

In the article "Democratic Decoupling", Iza Din and Dan Slater present a new phenomenon of democratic decay where its components break down at different speeds.

The authors were keen on explaining that democratization demise does not hold the same impact across the entire democracy realm. The concept of democratic decoupling is opposed to other theories of democratic decline, which tend to perceive it as more of a linear process, whereby democracy is regressing. In the context of this Danny Din, together with Slater, has opposed this view by pointing out that the various elements of democracy including competitive elections and protection of rights may diverge (Iza Ding, 2020).

The article titled "Illiberalism" by Desmond King and Jasper Theodor Kauth raises the problem of "illiberalism" in the context of the present-day political processes. The emphasis of the paper is on the peculiar process of democratization. By analyzing the variations of illiberalism in the current global context, the author of this article concludes that they are not easily fitting into the liberal-democratic or authoritarian dichotomy. However, the paper does not go to a considerable extent to identify factors that contributed to the increase in illiberalism in democracies (King, 2020).

The paper by Fabio Wolkenstein titled "what is democratic backsliding" strongly disapproves the trend of using such terms as 'backlash,' let alone 'democratic backsliding, without adequate definition. Thus, the author underlines the need to provide the proper conceptualization of the term "democratic backsliding" to avoid confusion across different contexts. The paper puts forward a new typology of distinguishing between "rights-suspending" and "rights-obstructing" types of democratic erosion. The paper does not explore the possible causes or the ways to address the phenomenon of democratic backsliding (Wolkenstein, 2022).

Thomas Carothers and Benjamin Press, in their analysis titled "Understanding and responding to global democratic backsliding," do not completely dismiss the 'external threat' to democracy, including within the efforts of the leader-centric approach to combating democratic retrogression. They think that more emphasis is to be placed on identifying goals and the plan of action of the leaders driving this phenomenon, instead of outright blaming the global phenomenon. In the authors' opinion, actions that foster democracy in different parts of the world should be directed toward the distinction of sufficient conditions and necessary conditions for democratization, the search for strategies and methodologies that may prevent leaders who rollback democracy, and identification of the programs that match the given types of motivation and methods on the part of leaders (Press, 2022).

The "Real Crisis of Global Order" by Alexander Cooley and Daniel H Nexon describes the prerequisites of highlighting the vulnerabilities of the liberal international order in the post-Trump world that the authors consider threats such as authoritarian back and forth; division within democracies itself; and the peculiarities of Sino-American relations (Alexander Cooley, 2021).

So, from the above literature review, it is evident that scholars tried to understand the rise of illiberalism, backsliding democratic regression, the transition from liberal to illiberal democracy, and the real-world order crisis but not the relation between the rise in the trend of illiberalism and democratic backsliding, and how it impacts democratic backsliding.

Material and Methods

This research adopts qualitative methods to examine illiberalism and its role in the onset of democratic regression. The study aims to offer a broad perspective on factors that have led to the emergence of illiberalism and how such factors contribute to the degradation of democracy by use of case study method. Both Primary and secondary data is used by the research. Primary source data includes books and official reports. The main approach used in the collection of secondary data involves an initial review of previous studies and analysis of academic research articles, and journalists or magazines such as the Dawn, etc.

Results and Discussion

Beginning of Illiberalism

Illiberalism could be considered a relatively new term in the sphere of social sciences and politics because it is identified as an ideology that is not very concrete in its definition and depends on the context.

Marlene Laruelle defines illiberalism as

- A new ideological universe that, even if doctrinally fluid and context-based, is to some degree coherent.
- It represents a backlash against today's liberalism in all its varied scripts – political, economic, cultural, geopolitical, civilizational – often in the name of democratic principles and thanks to them (by winning the popular vote).
- It proposes solutions that are majoritarian, nation-centric or sovereigntist, favouring traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity.
- It calls for a shift from politics to culture and is post-post-modern in its claims of rootedness in an age of globalization (laruelle, 2022).

The term 'illiberal' derives from the classical Latin word 'illiberalis' which originally appeared in the Ancient Rome political lexicon to describe the vile traits of a person until the eighteenth century. Later this term has been tendered to be used in relation to intolerant religions, and, in the course of time, political systems as well. In France in the context of the revolution in 1789, the term "illiberalism" was coined to refer to political systems that lacked respect for individual rights and ways of managing democracy (Rosenblatt, 2021).

Despite its relatively recent appearance and the absence of great philosophers who would invest it with conceptual depth, illiberalism has surpassed other light -isms or agendas, such as Putinism, Reaganism or Trumpism, and more, but much less consistent examples like liberalism, communism fascism.

Particularly critical to comprehending the dynamics of illiberalism is a critical link to post/postmodernism:

When talking about illiberalism rise, we can't ignore post-modernism. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the concept of 'liquid modernity' characterizes the postmodern period, marked by media immediacy, globalization, and fragmented identities. The post-postmodern attitude confronts the cosmopolitanism of the postmodern movement, calls for a return to classic modernity, and emphasizes the nation-state as the foundation of the international system.

It can therefore be depicted that illiberalism was a response to postmodernism, the morality turns after 1960, and the unipolar and globalization period after the Cold War undisputed US predominance. Having adapted to today's postmodern context of partial immediacy and fragmentation, illiberalism corresponds to the definition of the post-postmodern phenomenon as it seeks to renew the adherence to traditional values and national sovereignty against the background of globalization (Iaruelle, 2022).

Democratic Backsliding

Democratic Backsliding involves deliberate efforts by political executors to destabilize key democratic structures within the state. The phenomenon has changed since the cold war period where direct coups and election fraud dominated the phenomena but changed to one involving indirect measures with equally damaging impacts. This includes promissory coups, executive aggrandizement strategic manipulation of the electoral processes, and harassment (Wolkenstein, 2022).

Types of Democratic Backsliding:

Democratic Erosion

It is the type of backsliding that emerges when democratic standards decay which threatening the judicial systems, increases pressures on civil society, and employs propaganda and disinformation against political rivals.

Democratic Breakdown

To differentiate, breakdown is stark and abrupt. It triggers actions such as closing down the freedom of press, restricting non-governmental organizations, or de-registering democratic parties that causes a dramatic deterioration of democracy and freedom. Example of such breakdowns of democracy include; Poland, where the democracy breakdown happened in 2016 and Turkey, where the breakdown occurred in 2017.

Autocratic Deepening

Autocratic deepening may occur when regimes undermine democracy and enhance authoritarianism, for instance, through pressure on media and judiciary, imprisonment of journalists, and by pressurizing opposition. There are cases such as Venezuela that started between 2013 and 2021 and Myanmar that has been going on since 2021.

Current dictators subvert institutions of democracy to put themselves and maintain their rule. They may gain power through elections but once they are in power change laws and limit freedoms (Erica Shein, et al. 2023).

Relationship between Illiberalism and democratic backsliding

The emergence of illiberalism as a phenomenon in the current political context can be linked with the process of the decline of democracy on the global level. Some controversial authoritarian leaders include Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkiye, Narendra Modi of India, and Donald Trump of the United States of America who while using the democratic system to assume power eroded democracy. Here are factor that define relation between two.

Illiberalism and its Impact on Democratic Institutions

Illiberalism goes against the principles of conventional liberal democracy, which prioritizes the rights of the majority, national states, and similar cultural backgrounds in completing the exclusion of diverse principles of governance. This ideology is quite evident in actions that undermine our democratic systems, for instance, vote rigging, and influence over media and even judicial systems (Self, 2022).

Interplay between Illiberalism and Authoritarian Tactics

Unlike the previous authoritarian governments, which were explicit in their neglect of democratic values, today's autocrats use the language of sugarcoated in democratic values and are often involved in undemocratic processes. They ride on people's anger, orchestrate emergencies and exaggerate division, in order to rewind and consolidate power (Political Violence and Democratic Backsliding, 2022).

Case Studies

United States of America (USA)

The US has observed a dangerous increase of illiberal attitudes and practices in which democracy is endangered. The experience of the violent AF/Alt-Right rally that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017 at first glance, pointed to a reversal of fortunes for AF/Alt-Right and like-minded movements. The new groups were expected to decrease in activity based on such factors as the acts of de-platforming and less activity on the internet (Katz, 2017).

But a fresh look at the data uncovers a quite different picture in most cases. Although the Alt-Right and other related illiberal movements have encountered obstructions, such as deplatforming from multiple big online platforms, have continued to enjoy significant and constant reach. For example, after Charlottesville the traffic to the most popular Alt-Right sites reduced momentarily, the resulting quantity could be considered as high, which demonstrates constant support. However, the impact of such movements is not limited to viewer statistics alone which deserves to be refuted. Their discourse and political beliefs, which include ideas such as racialism, white superiority, and anti-liberal democracy, have remained relevant in the modern-day America. People such as Donald Trump, who does not possess a liberal approach to politics and has actively disseminated conspiracy theories, have taken these ideologies to different levels, including moving offline (Main, 2021).

The outcome of the 2020 presidential election showed that there is still strong electoral support for illiberal values in American society. The defeat of Trump, however, unveiled that many supporters around the US have low confidence in democratic procedures since his support embraced theories that the election was rigged and sponsored the act of conspiracy such as Qanon. This sentiment was brought to the foreground through rioting in the U. S Capitol on 6th January, 2021, epitomizing an anti-democracy spirit fostered by fake news and myths.

The phrase illiberalism is not a new one, especially when one thinks of the socio-political developments within Europe or the Americas in recent years but the continuing trends of illiberalism cause serious questions for the future of the American democracy (Alexander Cooley, 2021).

Turkiye

Present-day Türkiye with Erdogan as the president has changed and has adopted illiberal democracy. Türkiye carries out competitive elections, which despite being free and fair, doubts regarding the health of democracy and the government's ability for policy-making free from outside influence and for investment attraction have been causing worries.

Turkish elections continue to be highly competitive, although the more democratic facade it affords. Nonetheless, OSCE and other international organizations have pointed out systemic and widespread offenses that prejudice the outcome in favor of those in power. This media control is apparent as Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) utilizes up to 90% of the media outlets in the country, which are pro-government biased. This control prevents dissidents and challenges to the official narrative and colours public opinion, especially in matters concerning nationalism and identity politics obscuring the economic facts.

Precisely, the Erdogan regime has been well-known for policies that adversely affected freedom of the press, an essential tenet of democracy. This concentration of the media under government control decreases the amount of independence of views reaching the public, thus providing only the narrative that Erdogan and his administration would want the public to see.

Check and balances are democratic principles that have been eroded in Türkiye due to reforms that have reduced the independence of the judiciary.

The main political character in the picture, Erdogan, drew his political line based on nationalist and conservative democracy. Erdogan has been able to sustain votes amidst severe economic fluctuations and increased sociopolitical upheavals by undertaking populist discourse and measures that promote majority bias while diminishing democratic and minority values. This strategy strengthens his incumbency and deepens the cycle of power, thereby discouraging the spirit of pluralism and none for inclusive political systems.

The worrying trends of authoritarianism accompanied by a dismantling of the checks and balances institutions may prove hazardous to Turkey as an investment destination for foreign investors.

All in all, the incipient illiberal democracy under Erdogan's leadership in Türkiye presents models of how the dawn of illiberal democracy hinders democratic structures as well as foreign investors (Kinneer, 2023).

India

The country, which was once famous for its unyielding democracy, has gone through noticeable democracy decay since the election of Narendra Modi in 2014. Even though India has formally preserved the recognizable democratic organizations, the decline of civil rights and liberties, as well as other democratic rights, caused the change of the country's status from a free democracy to a "hybrid regime".

India's institutional structures of democracy, such as free and fair elections, the deactivation of the Emergency laws, and the existence of rival political parties, are still in place. Yet, the degradation of informal democratic norms that are crucial for the health

of democracies worldwide, including the US—be it freedom of speech or civil liberties—has been sharp. The freedom of a country is reflected by the point scored as its civil liberties, as rated by Freedom House; since Modi became PM, India's civil liberties score has decreased progressively and was 33 in 2023 out of a total of 60. This decline has been to a large extent responsible for the downgrading of India from a free country to a partly free status, illustrating a trend of increasing illiberalism despite being a competitive electoral process.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi headed government has gradually sought to clamp down on freedom of speech in legal and, more egregiously, non-legal ways. Sedition laws that were inherited from the colonial days still linger, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, UAPA further amended and reformed recently, causes critics and dissenters to become targets. Courts have been increasingly dealing with sedition charges, the majority of which were filed after Modi's administration came to power – a sign of a government suppressing vocal opposition. New amendments to the UAPA also make it possible to declare a person as a terrorist without adequate judicial remedy which has further led to suppression and intolerant attitude of the authorities towards journalists, activists, and scholars who carry out critical reporting of the government.

Indian media has been on the decline not just in terms of emerging as a vibrant society under the present regime of Modi. Self-employment of media has been an area that has suffered a lot of threats, pressures and ownership alterations to accommodate people friendly to the government. This has brought out the fact that press freedom in India has diminished considerably as per Reporters without Borders ranking it below countries such as Afghanistan and Belarus. The second challenge is that ECA journalists receive threats, are subjected to harassment campaigns and legal actions for their work that is critical of the government, making most ECA countries to be unconstitutional and have virtually no media freedom.

Muslims in particular, the biggest minority in India have been subjected to increased discriminative measures and violence under the leadership of Modi. They have been fanned over the years and recently escalated to mob lynching of Muslims and legal enactment, namely the CAA that does not grant streamlined citizenship to Muslims. The CAA and accompanying policies have caused concern over electoral exclusion and minority marginalization of Muslims. While social inclusion is a social justice issue, Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality posits that race and gender interact in societies to create social inequality for the desired structure of rights (Maizland, 2024).

This implies that the independence of the judiciary, which was considered to be a significant counterbalance to the powers of the executive has been questioned. Several criticisms have been levelled against the Modi government, especially given the fact that it dominates the appointment of judges and determination of the outcomes. There has also been a loss of control by the legislative branch in part due to parliaments compiling less number of checks and balances with bills and decisions made without much of a consultative process.

Modi has led India towards a path fraught with democratic decay, illiberal disruption, and authoritarian tendencies. In this case, the systematic Part, removal of civil liberties, media freedom, and minority rights has made India a hybrid democracy. Transitions this method not only alone but also nourishes important concerns for international spectators and investors regarding the steadiness of democracies and rights of the person in their internal policy (Tudor, 2023).

Rising tide of Illiberalism and its effects on international security

The rising tide of illiberalism can have devastating impacts on international security. Some of them are discussed below:

Erosion of Normative Foundations

Modern political illiberalism manifested in leaders such as Trump, Erdogan, and Modi challenges the very core liberal international order values. This order created after WWII has its foundation in democracy, political liberalism, and cooperation of the liberal democracies to avoid crises. Illiberal leaders, on the other hand, challenge these principles by seeking to discredit electoral processes, espousing autocratic discourses, and containing protesters.

Threat to Democratic Governance

Authoritarian political leaders do a lot of things that are contrary to the principles of democracy including curbing the freedom of the media, bullying civil society organizations, and employing legal procedures to disparage opponents. This undermining of the democratic norms not only affect stability within the domestic sphere but also sets a bad precedent around the world, where such actions with a liberal demeanor may worsen and reduce democratic cohesion (Gillespie, 2017).

Challenges to International Institutions:

The principle of liberalism in international relations calls for cooperation and diplomacy through the use of international organizations, trade, relations, and diplomatic alliances. Illiberal leaders resist these institutions by either denying their authority, withdrawing or otherwise undermining them.

Potential for Conflict and Instability: Potential for Conflict and Instability

This situation poses a threat of conflict and instability in the region since a decrease in international cooperation in the sphere of security is observed because of the increased illiberalism. Authoritarian regimes are more likely to have nationalist tendencies which enhance the interest of a country as opposed to international relations. This may result in increased tensions between states, decreased reliance on diplomacy as a means of solving conflicts or disagreements, and an overall increase in geopolitical volatility (CSPS, 2022).

Conclusion

The problem of illiberalism is far more dangerous when it comes to traditional standards of democracy and sovereignty as well as stability. As for the democratic values and institutions, illiberalism appeared to be a postmodern/post-globalization strategy of redrawing the political maps by 'mainstreaming' majors, nationalism, and a lack of cultural diversity in place of a liberal democracy. Represented by Erdogan, Modi, Trump, or any other presidents and leaders of the world this phenomenon undermines the foundations of the democratic process through the control of media, twisted judiciary systems, and suppression of protests and strikes. To minimize the risks of illiberalism on international security, policymakers must enhance institutional democratization, enhance civil awareness, and work to promote cooperation on the international stage. Therefore, the preservation of liberal democracy is crucial to the achievement of the objectives needed to foster a friendly international order, especially given the

growing authoritarian trends. Fighting illiberalism, however, goes beyond nationalist domestic-structural alterations and therefore requires coalition efforts at the global level to enhance the general principles therefore the future anchored on democracy human rights, and stability.

Recommendations

- Support and stabilize institutions of democratic governance by empowering independent branches of the judiciary, a free media, and civil society.
- Support institutional and financial assistance to countries that are experiencing democratic erosion in a bid to contain the cycle and support democratic values.
- Support the initiatives aimed at increasing the skills of thinking critically and civically, as well as help students develop their civil consciousness from childhood.
- Sustainably reestablish the trust of the people in their democratic institutions by insisting on the accountability of leaders and by enhancing transparency in their governments.
- Do diplomatic engagements. Bring together foreigners who support liberal democratic values to defeat common opponents in the global community of states.
- Promote and support international organizations as well as international associations with democratic principles as their foundation like the UN, NATO, and various regional unions.
- Support democratic CSOs, human rights activists, and independent media outlets operating in the countries of interest, helping them deliver on democracy promotion and human rights protection agendas.
- Engage on the international scene in promoting human rights and supporting such campaigns as the 'Global Fight Back' against authoritarianism and oppression.
- Link economic aid and trade liberalization policy with conditions that have to do with democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.
- Support and propagate measures to limit and sanction actors and organizations involved in the oppression of political freedoms and human rights defenders.
- Develop exchanges and scholarships for students, teachers, musicians, artists or any other people which will foster the spirit of international relations and democratic values.

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